VISIT…

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Introduction

ELIZABETH EZRA and JANE SILLARS

Michael Haneke's *Caché/Hidden* (2005) is a film that seems to generate endless discussion. Part thriller, part mystery, part ghost story, it seems to haunt people long after they see it, prompting them to talk about it to the point at which one would normally expect the interpretive possibilities to be exhausted – but still, new interpretations keep bubbling up, sometimes unbidden. And yet, although this film is certainly puzzling in many respects, it resists attempts to read it as a puzzle to be decoded. Perhaps it is compelling not because it has great deal to say (in the sense that its silences are just as informative as its utterances), but because it elicits an unusually wide range of responses from so many different perspectives.

Having found the film so generative ourselves, we were keen to extend this conversation and conceived of a collection of pieces drawn from writers with whom we had previously collaborated, or whose work we had drawn on or had simply admired from afar. In keeping with the film's transnational pedigree (Haneke is an Austrian director working in France and the film addresses the Franco-Algerian War and its aftermath), this dossier crosses boundaries, both geographical and disciplinary, and touches on questions of concern to fields of inquiry ranging from cultural, social and literary theory to film aesthetics, history, philosophy and psychoanalysis.

In the responses to the film that we have brought together in the following pages of this dossier, there are remarkable convergences of analysis, despite the wide range of critical perspectives and approaches to

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the film, but there are also profound disagreements, both among the pieces, and with our own analysis. The divergent responses that *Caché* has elicited speak to the extraordinary breadth of the film's allegorical resonance and the variety of interpretations it can support.

In our own essay, '*Hidden* in plain sight', we examine the questions of how people look, and what they overlook, in relation to the dynamics of individual guilt and collective responsibility. We go on to consider the implications of the film's play with generic conventions and its repeated thwarting of audience expectation. Not only do we not learn 'whodunnit', but the film reveals this question to be beside the point. It is precisely the perspective of 'besideness', we argue, that the film dramatizes in its insistence upon pushing central events and expectations to the periphery, while situating the surface – and the ostensibly superficial – at its core.

Next, the writer and filmmaker Mark Cousins considers the film's appeal to audiences, arguing that Haneke's ability to mirror European bourgeois arthouse viewers back to themselves played a major role in the film's fortunes – not only with audiences but also at an industrial level through the response to the film by distributors and exhibitors. Cousins's argument that Haneke uses the audience as 'semiconductors' for the film's ideas makes interesting connections between different circuits of exchange – not only economic exchange but also that of ideas and interpretations – and adds a different dimension to the film's exploration of collusion. Martine Beugnet picks up the idea of *Caché* as a film that thinks in her exploration of the filmic apparatus and the attempt to unpick the hybrid technology and techniques that create Haneke's 'chilly vision' poised between cinema and video. She goes on to suggest that Haneke's own hybrid authorial identity – as the 'most French of Austrian directors' – offers an expansive and penetrating examination of forms of historical amnesia, not confined to French society, which is able to open up what Max Silverman elsewhere calls the 'disavowed unconscious life' hidden within our individual and social identities.

In contrast to the other contributors, Paul Gilroy argues that the film does not expose complicity but rather it acts as its conduit, offering a 'horrible accommodation' with political resignation. Gilroy's pithy and thought-provoking response to *Caché* condemns the film's two-dimensional characterization and its reliance on the whodunnit form as an 'elaborate exercise in mystification', whereas Ranjana Khanna, conversely, sees the investigative framework as a means of bringing to light what has been disavowed or repressed. Khanna proposes an instructive comparison with Poe's 'Rue Morgue', an early work of detective fiction, arguing that the story's emphasis on spectacular violence, diffuse responsibility, surveillance, intrusion, and non-human agency anticipates *Caché*'s investigation of unresolved questions of postcolonial guilt and uneasy implication.

Like Khanna, Max Silverman looks back to an earlier text – in this case, Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* – uncovering some uncanny echoes between Georges's paranoid visions and the 'imago of the Algerian' that, according to Fanon, is constructed by the violence of the colonizer and then projected back onto the colonized. The piece casts light on the relation between past and present in the way the film's childhood betrayal has embedded within it the greater, national secret of the French police massacre of 1961. Silverman goes on to argue that Haneke's manipulation of the image tests the power of images to disturb the defensive, closed-off identity of the postcolonial subject. The conclusion of his piece, as that of the film, gestures forward to the future – the one space, in this age of constant surveillance and historical introspection, that can be said to remain truly hidden.

Hidden in plain sight: bringing terror home

ELIZABETH EZRA and JANE SILLARS

In a world where turning a blind eye has become an art, Michael Haneke's 2005 *Caché/Hidden* explores the ways in which being made to look – and to think – can be experienced as forms of terror. Both fascinating and profoundly banal, it is a film about waiting and watching – and then not seeing what is right in front of you. The film's deceptively narrow depiction of a world of material privilege corroded by psychic unease opens up broader questions of the political deployment of fear and paranoid fantasy, and the dishonesties and displacements of postcolonialism. The film's narrative unfolds in a European city, showing us members of a bourgeois family who appear to have taken refuge behind the walls of their own home, yet who remain unable to shut out the past and their own feelings of paranoia and persecution. They see themselves as victims of a campaign of terror, which initially takes the form of videotapes pushed through the door. These tapes appear to show little more than the unexceptional surface of their everyday lives, yet they serve to unlock a secret from the past, a hidden story of colonial suffering – and in doing so expose the structures of oppression and complicity on which their lives are built.

One of the ironies of the dominant critical response to this film in the UK and the US has been the attempt to limit its exploration of colonial culpabilities to its French setting. In this, there seems to be a symptomatic acting out of the film's themes of displacement, avoidance and the refusal to look close to home. *Caché* forces us to think about what we allow inside and what we insist remains outside; the ways we psychologically, physically (and legislatively) construct and imagine the idea of 'home'. What does it mean to construct a home as a place of

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safety, a refuge that shuts out the world, the past? What happens (on an individual and political level) when we invest in the paranoid fantasy of home as a fortress?

Certainly, both Georges (Daniel Auteuil) and Anne (Juliette Binoche) are depicted, visually at least, as prisoners of their own making, or at least of their own circumstances – a message that is encoded in the film's use of setting and costume. That the couple's stylish house is a gated fortress is driven home visually and sonically: the composition of shots of its exterior puts its vertical barred windows centre frame; horizontal bars cut across shots; the iron gate clangs. Georges's and Anne's grey, shapeless clothes are reminiscent of prison uniforms and have nothing of the chic glamour of outfits worn by French characters of their milieu in countless other contemporary films. These characters are shown literally behind bars, and bars, moreover, feature as part of the set of Georges's television programme (the chairs are encased in bars, and Georges is framed in bars when talking on the phone after taping). Some of the contributors to this dossier point out that the book-lined set of the literary programme mirrors Georges's and Anne's home, in which thousands of books, flatly lit and lining the walls, figure as decorative objects. Lacking in volume, apparently two-dimensional and with their titles obscured, these function more as blocks to the outside world than as prompts for meaningful reflection or exchange, or new ways of looking. We also see books piling up in the office of Georges's producer, who says he does not have time to read them. In this film, books cannot open up other perspectives or the past, because they are never opened. (They can only say 'nothing', one of the first words of the film.) On the television set, the glass table around which guests chat and sip water, as the books loom around and above them, is composed and shot to resemble the family dinner table, suggesting that the 'reality' of Georges's and Anne's life is, on some level, staged. When the outside world intrudes upon their carcereal existence, they attempt to banish it, just as Georges is shown editing out a discussion of the censorship of Rimbaud from his television programme – even discussion of censorship is censored if it is not part of the preordained 'script'. At the dinner party that Anne and Georges host, Georges awkwardly breaks into a discussion of mutual friends to ask about a script, and when the subject is changed he again attempts to steer the discussion back on to the script.

What is censored at the dinner party is a discussion of a friend's illness. It is mentioned that this friend, Simone, has been replaced in her husband's affections by a woman named 'Marianne', a name that Anne finds surprising (doubtless because it so transparently refers to the icon of French republicanism) and that is repeated three times to ensure that audiences make no mistake about its significance. Marianne is deemed to be very *sympa*, short for *sympathique*, or nice. Through their dinner party banter, the group of friends has collectively shifted attention away from the ill woman, whom one of the characters dismisses as someone she was 'never very close to anyway', on to someone whose name invokes the

French republican values of universalism and cultural integration, imposed legislatively, for example, by the banning of religious expression, such as the wearing of Muslim headscarves, in French schools. That which does not fit in, or which causes discomfort – vulnerability, need, difference – is banished from 'polite' (and political) society. The dinner party scene also comprises a literal shaggy dog story, which hooks its audience by means of a precise date (the only other clearly specified date that appears in the film being Georges's citation of the police massacre of the Algerian protesters), and which suggests that historic events can come back to bite you, and can even, according to the storyteller, leave a scar. When someone asks if the story is true, everyone laughs, because that is not the point, just as the ontological status of the messages and the identity of the person making the videotapes in the film are not the point.

Instead, this set piece dramatizes the complicity of the audience in the construction of its narrative, whereas its content exposes the way the past continues to haunt and to traumatize the present. The form of the shaggy dog story further encapsulates the experience of watching the film, raising generic and narrative expectations with which audiences begin to engage, which are then thwarted when they realize that this film is not the whodunnit they bargained for, despite its formal nods to the filmic conventions of thriller, family melodrama and horror. After Georges witnesses Majid's suicide, the first place he goes is to the cinema, where posters advertise the coming attractions: *Ma mère* (my mother – one of the adults responsible for sending Majid [Maurice Benijou] away), *Deux frères* (two brothers, or Georges and Majid), *La mauvaise éducation* (bad education – what Majid's son informs Georges that Majid suffered as a result of being ejected from Georges's family home) and *Mariages* (marriages – the family melodrama hinted at when Pierrot accuses his mother of having an affair with her colleague), which seem to spell out the various domestic and allegorical configurations in which Georges is implicated, as well as the various narrative and generic routes down which *Caché* as a film could have gone. Again the shift from the depiction of Majid's suicide to Georges's emergence from the cinema raises complex questions about the status of the scene between the two men that we have witnessed. Their first meeting shifts from a style of cross-cutting and multiple camera angles following their confrontation to a replay of the encounter shot from the fixed position of the unseen camera recording the videotapes, marking an apparent distinction between the event's occurrence and its video replay. However, the scene of Majid's suicide is shown only from the fixed camera, seen through the eye of the unseen observer. Not only does this reinforce the film's repeated questioning of the status of the image – the nature and temporality of what is seen, the position and implication of the witness – it also lends a sense that Majid's act is historically and ideologically over-determined, forced into being by the representational power of Georges's fantasy, always already having happened.

Caché disrupts our expectations from the very beginning, when we learn that we have not been seeing what we had previously thought. In part, this disruption is effected through the construction of modes of articulation and of narrative progression that constantly double back, overlap and fast-rewind, disorienting the spectator. The extended opening shot (revealed eventually as the video footage of Georges's and Anne's house) breaks cinematic conventions through the length of take, the static camera and the increasingly insistent soundtrack of ambient noise. Already feeling uneasy, the viewer then sees the image freeze, speed up and spool forward. This questioning of the status of the image – both its temporality and its truth value – is repeated throughout *Caché*. The film insists on the need to look in different ways, and to listen. Georges's response to Anne's opening word – *Alors?* (So?) – *Rien* (Nothing) – is one that closes off inquiry and denies the possibility of meaning and one that recurs at key points in the film (Anne's and Georges's lines are reversed when the first drawing arrives; later, the lines are repeated in Georges's conversation with his mother). In place of other historical and psychological modes of exploration, Georges and Anne become fixated on discovering where the tape has been shot from – in other words, its geographical point of origin. Throughout the film they show themselves to be adept at reading maps: they quickly figure out the location of what turns out to be Majid's building, and they even have a relief map in their bathroom, as well as an abstract painting snaking across their living room walls that looks as though it is charting the course of a long river. This is perhaps because boundaries are so very important to them.

In Georges's and Anne's world, meaning is to be found on the surface: Pierrot's swimming coach urges him 'Less depth!', and, as Paul Gilroy notes in his piece here, the characters themselves are in many ways two-dimensional ciphers. But rather than read this depthlessness (particularly that of Majid) as one of the film's failings, we wish to suggest the possibility that it is being used as a diversionary tactic, like the adumbrated generic conventions that tempt and ultimately frustrate the viewer. In what is certainly the film's most self-conscious scene, in which Anne and Georges discuss Pierrot's disappearance while news of the Iraq War blares from the widescreen TV in the centre of the frame, the conventions of bourgeois melodrama and of classical realism compel viewers to attempt to shut out news of the outside world in order to focus on the apparent domestic crisis. The ease with which we fail to identify with (or even notice) real events, and the insistence we place on identifying with Georges and Anne, who are not particularly sympathetic characters and thus not easy to identify with, underscores the film's apparently perverse but ultimately effective interrogation of what John Berger famously called 'ways of seeing'.

The name of the street from which the surveillance of the house is conducted may indicate that there are other ways to read. The fact that this street is called the rue des Iris hints at an allegorical significance but,

as with so much in this film, it opens up a variety of readings. Clearly the dominant reference is to sight, as so much of the film's questioning of conventional interpretive strategies occurs on a visual level; but there may be a hint of Iris as the messenger goddess too (in Greek mythology, Iris, the goddess of the rainbow, carries messages to humanity from the gods communicating to the human plane from the non-human). Above all, the iris motif gestures to the 'iris' as an organic or manufactured optical device. Much of the cinema of looking, from *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954) to *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960), plays with the ambiguity of the eye as symbol: both looking out and shutting off the inside; penetrating yet vulnerable to penetration; an aperture to be opened and closed. Most of all, the iris motif indicates the ways in which the film is very much about opening one's eyes, and opening up the camera lens to new perspectives.

The most haunting perspective of all is the anonymous one that leaves us wondering just who is responsible for the videotapes. From whose unblinking viewpoint are we watching events unfold? Who is responsible for the crime? Just what is the crime, exactly? Who is the perpetrator and who the victim? Georges's 'crime' as a child is very different from his crime as an adult. A six-year-old child cannot be held responsible (certainly not legally speaking, and for many, ethically speaking as well) for his actions, however selfish these might be, and his motivation – not wanting to share what he sees as his – is an ordinary if unsavoury childhood impulse. The child's 'crime' cannot, therefore, be mapped easily onto France's colonial history, but Georges's refusal as an adult to acknowledge the effects of his earlier actions suggests a parallel with the postcolonial metropolitan who is neither wholly responsible for, nor wholly untainted by, past events from which he or she has benefited. The movements of history often transcend the role of the individual. This is why the question of 'whodunnit' is precisely the wrong question to ask of this film, and why viewers who insist on asking it are bound to be disappointed, because the individual cannot bear the full responsibility for history. Nonetheless, Georges's crime consists in taking this fact as licence to absolve himself of all responsibility, protesting repeatedly, 'I refuse to have a bad conscience'. He refuses to engage with history on any level.

Caché plays with spectatorial complicity (are we in control of, or controlled by, what we see?), in order to explore the nature of complicity itself, and the interface between individual and collective responsibility. The film repeatedly breaks the bounds of the individual, using Rimbaud's 'Je est un autre' (I is an other) as a point of departure for mapping domestic space onto social (civic or national) space. In contrast, cinema's dominant model of representing terrorism concentrates on its spectacular manifestations, leaving its causes marginalized. As such, it mirrors a political discourse that demands that we read acts of terror as coming from nowhere and signifying nothing beyond the 'evil' of those who commit them. *Caché* both participates in and dramatizes the mediation

between collective agency and the sets of structures in which individuals live, operate and turn a blind eye to what is going on around them. This blindness manifests itself in the midst of the post-spectacular, media-saturated society of surveillance, in which 'onlookers' routinely overlook their own responsibility as witnesses. For it is in this that the 'campaign of terror' against Georges consists: being made to look (at drawings, at video footage and, ultimately, at himself).

The final scenes in which we see Georges would appear to indicate that he is refusing the demand to see and to remember. He closes the heavy curtains of his bedroom, having taken two sleeping tablets (*cachets*, pronounced just like the title of the film). However, the scenes that follow suggest greater ambiguity. The tantalizing ending of the film can be read equally as a paranoid fantasy – Majid's son and Georges's son have conspired to make the tapes – or, as Max Silverman suggests, as a utopian fantasy – the next generation can work together to begin to undo the wrongs of the previous generation. Either way, Georges's and Anne's son, like Majid's son, will depart from the assumptions and practices of his parents' generation, a departure that is prefigured narratively when Pierrot goes missing, and decoratively, in the family home, when Anne confronts Georges about his lies while standing before three brass elephants of varying sizes, a mother and father separated from their child.[1] Majid's unnamed son seems to possess a social mobility denied to his father. While Majid only leaves his apartment when forcibly removed by the police, his son takes his questions to Georges at the television station. In this institutional centre of French cultural life, he enters unhindered, moving across a series of thresholds where Georges attempts to stall him: the lift door, the inner office, even the lavatories. Majid's son is shown to be able to challenge Georges's actions and his refusal to face the past and his own responsibilities.

For Georges is not only made to see, he is also made to listen. In the film's opening shot of Georges's and Anne's house, we hear what is apparently the ambient sound of birdsong. This birdsong seems at first to be little more than noise, in the way, perhaps, that the television broadcasting news of world events, including the occupation of Iraq, at first seems like 'noise' competing with Anne's and Georges's increasingly frantic dialogue about their missing son. The French word for white noise is '*le parasite*', appropriately suggesting the invasion of a host, which is also invoked when Majid invites Georges into his home to watch him commit suicide (though in an inversion of the figure of the immigrant as 'guest' in debates about postcolonial 'hospitality' currently raging in France), and again in Georges's claim at the film's close that he may have caught a virus. What initially seems like white noise, however, turns out to be very significant. The birdsong from the film's opening shot is identical to the birdsong in the penultimate scene, the flashback to Georges's boyhood home when the young Majid is taken away by force; in the farmyard, we see chickens but we hear sparrows. In fact, the soundtrack in these two scenes sounds the same (including footsteps

1 We wish to thank Mark Brownrigg for this observation, and Tom Arah, Myra Macdonald, Stephanie Marriott and Bethan Benwell for illuminating discussion of the film.

crunching and car doors slamming) but for one thing: Majid's screams have been removed from the opening shot. When Georges replays the scene in his mind's eye at the end of the film, after having witnessed the adult Majid's suicide, he finally allows himself to hear the violence of the past, which manages to break through not only the birdsong, which becomes louder and louder, but also Georges's own psychic barriers. The cries Georges hears may also be interpreted as an expression of his own feelings – not the pain of victimization, which belongs solely to Majid – but the shame of having suppressed the memory of Majid's cries, and his own role in eliciting them. The cries in this scene not only show the leakage of the past into the present, they also remind us that while collective responsibility creates the possibility of the avoidance of guilt, shame – that intense, hidden, individual emotion – can reconnect us to that guilt. Shame has the power to animate history and to reveal to us our part in it.

After the end: word of mouth and *Caché*

MARK COUSINS

After the press screening the day before the world premiere of *Caché*, it was already clear that the film, through its ambiguous narrative construction, was one of those that gets you talking, and keeps you talking for days afterwards. At such screenings in Cannes, the world's press usually ambles out, blinking, into the sunshine, but when the lights went up after *Caché* there was an immediate hubbub. Urgent clusters formed. The screening had caused a build-up of pressure in the auditorium – pressure to talk.

What we discussed in those first moments in May 2005 is what audiences have talked about since – the last shot of the film and the implications of the position of the camera at the moment when Majid slits his throat. The former because crucial plot information was apparently hidden within the background activity of the image; the latter because of whose point of view the shot seemed to represent. These two shots called to each other across the second half of the movie or, rather, called us to reconcile them towards, or after, the final reel. We tried to do so, as did, when the film was released, about 600,000 people in the USA and more than 200,000 in the UK, to name just two of the territories in which the film 'overperformed'.

There is nothing new in audiovisual culture causing social conversation, of course. Often in the analogue age, as with the 'Who Shot JR?' speculation about the television show *Dallas* (Lorimar/Warner TV,

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tx March 1980 in the USA), a conventional narrative suture was driven and enforced by mass media, to their enormous financial gain, and the conversation was about whodunnit and why. A decade later, *Twin Peaks* (Lynch/Frost Productions, 1989–91), the speculation was not about a single withheld secret – the identity of the killer – but the nature of the world being betrayed, its surreal characters and repetitions. Still on television, ABC's *Lost* (2005–) combines the diffuse intrigue of *Twin Peaks* with the manufactured social conversation of *Dallas*, this time across multiple platforms, thereby allowing teenagers online and daytime television viewers, for example, to enter socially separate forums of conjecture.

Films in general, especially non-studio, non-native-language films with limited distribution budgets, find it far more difficult than television, with its far larger audiences and ongoing presence, to activate social conjecture. When *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, 1992) did so, the talking point was partially about the hidden secret (the gender of Dil, played by Jaye Davidson), but also about the implications that secret had for the relationship between Dil and Fergus (Stephen Rea). Here, as in the case of *Twin Peaks*, was ongoing *bouche-à-oreille* that started, rather than ended, when the secret was revealed. Subsequent films that created social conversation, such as *Ringu* (Hideo Nakata, 1998), *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, 1999), *The Passion of the Christ* (Mel Gibson, 2004) and *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005), did so as a result of genre innovations rather than because they posed sophisticated questions about dramaturgy or ontology.

The case of *Caché* is intriguing in this context. As with the above films and television programmes, it electrified particular social networks. It made certain types of people and groupings semiconductors for its suture, mystery and anxieties. What types of people? What did they conduct and why?

An anecdote begins to answer the first question. A UK distributor and an English owner of cultural cinemas separately told me that *Caché* did well in the UK (it took more than a million pounds on twenty-six screens) because, in addition to universally good reviews and elements of a thriller narrative, it has dinner parties in it. Not only did it intrigue, but it featured people whose social lives are organized like those of the middle-class, urban, ideas-aware groups that journalists dismissively call the chattering classes and which Jurgen Habermas would see in more enlightened terms. *Caché* held a mirror up to such socio-intellectual networks and showed them anxieties which, to them, were unexpected, clever and stimulating.

Though only an anecdote, it would be unwise to underestimate the sense that cinema owners and distributors get about a film by watching who goes in to the screening, hearing what they say in the auditorium on the way out and clocking the daily box-office figures in cinemas serving urban elites. On its UK release, *Caché* became an element in the ongoing process in which ideas-aware elite metropolitan groupings signified to

each other that they were up to date, surfing the intellectual *Zeitgest*, engaged with forms of cinema that were other than pacifying, in ways that were other than reactive. If this is the case, then the real suturing of these audiences (the key scene in the film) is the dinner party hosted by Anne and Georges in which they first share their anxieties about the videotape stalking that is unsettling their lives. The scene is one of release. Their social family is in place, their communing ritual has begun and they begin to ease their disquiet into the situation, onto the table as it were. In psychoanalytic terms, it is a scene of attempted and apparent transference from twin analysand to group analyst. So familiar and relied upon is this kind of social-psychoanalytic cure for each of them that Anne and Georges seem more comfortable in its process than they are together, alone. Their distress finds its most comfortable mise-en-scene there, at the table.

To say this, to see this dinner party scene as central to *Caché* and the moment that locks its audience to it, is to begin to agree with one of the more familiar readings of director Michael Haneke's work since *Funny Games* (1997) – that he is the great disconcertor of European metropolitan elites; that he maltreats them in his films (or the city-worlds they have created for themselves maltreat them) and that they like it. Is this true in the case of *Caché*? In all those real-life dinner parties, reflections of the dinner parties in Haneke's films, was masochism the underscore? Unlike in the case of *Funny Games*, or *Code inconnu* (2000), it is difficult to detect such an underscore in *Caché*. Haneke is surely right when he says that if, when we leave the auditorium, we are asking *who did it*, we are asking the wrong question, and that we should, instead, be asking about the nature of colonial guilt. But is this exactly what happens after seeing *Caché*? Certainly, at that first screening in Cannes, the question was not, at least initially, a moral and national-memory one. It was a compound narrative-aesthetic one – who was there in the final moments of the film and – for me – the *non*-narrative (that is, philosophical) implication of the position of the suicide scene camera.

In other words, *Caché* does not discomfit as much as Haneke thinks. In Britain, at least, this is partially because the colonial guilt on display is so French. Viewers in the dwindling British empire are not encouraged to see their national guilt in Georges's distress, just his and his wife's social situation. The film does not go further and *deflect* a reading that would see the Georges/French crime as similar to other colonial crimes but, I believe, nor does it provide even space – passive occasions – for a thought connection between 'their' crimes and 'ours'.

Instead, its provocation, the pressure cooker effect it creates during viewing, the need to speak that it creates, is not confessional ('we did those things too'), nor – if Haneke is right – purely narrative ('was that the two sons on the steps at the end? If so does that mean they were both sending the videotapes and drawings?'), but philosophical. Where *Dallas* made people ask 'who?', *Twin Peaks* 'what?', the genre-bending films of the last decade 'how?' and *The Crying Game* was about the implications

of the answer, *Caché's* conversational buzz was more circular. Yes, we asked 'who?' Then, when it was clear that this question was not answered by the film, we considered *why* it was not answered. The answer was, among other things, because of 'impossible' camera positions. The suicide was seen by a fake or non-existent observer, the film itself used an aesthetic code which in this case did not mean what it usually does – though we only figure this out later, and many only figure it out *after* the later, in the table-talk of their lives, which is enjoyably like the table-talk in the film but less uneasy. The film structures our experience in a generically gripping way but then the structure melts away at the moment when it should most cohere, requiring us to look back along its length (the structure's length and the film's) to work out where we went wrong.

But we did not go wrong. We went where we were told to go, we took the hand of the narrative that, in the final stages, slipped away, leaving us without co-ordinates. This, I believe, is why *Caché* made conversational waves. John Sayles attempted a similar thing in *Limbo* (1999), a filmic 'you're on your own'. *Caché* did not compel us to work out the implications of the answer, but the implications of the question. Why am I prepared to fall for the generic intrigue of a thriller? What was the film thinking at each stage of the story? How do its thoughts relate to my own? What happens when I realize that its thoughts were not what I thought they were and, therefore, the connection between its and mine that seemed to take place and develop in the course of viewing must, in retrospect, near the end of the movie, or after the end, in conversations, be disconnected and untangled? This is what happened at those mirror-image dinner parties: cognitive disentanglement. In talking about *Caché*, people withdrew from the dilemmas into which it had drawn them. The opposite, in other words, of what Anne and Georges ended up doing. They, Anne and Georges, thought they were offloading anxiety, but they were not. We were.

Blind spot

MARTINE BEUGNET

The opening images of *Caché* encapsulate everyday, middle-class ordinariness: shot in fixed frame, the unblinking long take shows the façade of a comfortable-looking house partly hidden behind a thick privet hedge. After a while, a passer-by crosses the frame, then a cyclist. The door opens and closes as a woman leaves the house. When no human presence is in sight, only the slight shiver of leaves in the left-hand corner indicates that the shot is live. For all the image's reassuring dullness, Haneke's aesthetics of dread is already at work, permeating the image through the claustrophobic effect of its immobile gaze and thwarted perspective: on each side of the frame, the end of a street narrows the confines of the view; at the back of the house, a row of tall buildings blocks the entire perspective – rows of anonymous windows gazing back at the camera.

Breaking a long-lasting silence (films on France's 'dirty war' were censured at the time and there have been few since), a number of films of the Algerian war by French filmmakers have been released recently (such as *Mon Colonel* [Laurent Herbier, 2006], *La Trahison* [Philippe Faucon, 2005] and *19 Octobre 1961* [Alain Tasma, 2005]). These films often describe the complex situation of the alienated protagonists of a dirty conflict, inviting identification with unexceptional men and women torn between contradictory allegiances. In comparison, Haneke's treatment stands out for the chilly vision that the instrumentation of the film and video apparatus creates. Is it Haneke's hybrid identity as a director – as the most French of Austrian filmmakers, at the cross between two

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national cultures known for their propensity to historical amnesia – that gives him the necessary detachment to scrutinize his characters like an entomologist?

I would suggest that to account for the effect of the disincarnated presence (this 'body without organs' to use Artaud and Deleuze's phrase) that the film's apparatus creates, merely in terms of the sadistic inclination of a demiurgic filmmaker intent on manipulating his audience, is to dismiss the more unsettling effect created by the film: the inscription of trauma, via the video image, in the body of the film itself.

In his account of filmmaking as a form of 'Lazaréen art', Max Silverman draws on Jean Cayrol's writings to describe the emergence of a new aesthetic vision based on 'the interplay between everyday life and horror', where the presence of the most mundane of objects can reveal the existence of a 'disavowed unconscious life (both psychic and social) into the normalized and commodified appearance of the everyday'.[1] Noting the connection, in Alain Resnais's 1955 work, between the Holocaust and the unspoken advent of the Algerian war, Silverman stresses the complexity involved in the elaboration of a new aesthetic in terms that are highly resonant in the context of Haneke's latest feature: the new direction envisaged in Cayrol's post-Holocaust aesthetic vision is neither that of an 'immanentist' art (reducing everything to the same postmodern flattening of effect and conflation of surface and depth) nor a Manichean art (maintaining the boundaries between opposites) but one that is sensitive to the play between similarity and difference, reference and transformation and hence 'genuinely troubling to us all'.[2]

In *Caché*, the object that reconnects the present with a disavowed past may be the image itself – or, rather, the video image. Once held as the benevolent companion of middle-class familial history, in Haneke's work, video becomes the obstinate witness to the everyday denial of intolerable realities and memories. Here, its gaze is not associated with its benign expressions – the endearing unsteadiness of home movies or the roaming, intimate cinematic style and fluid camera work characteristic of many of the 1990s feature films shot in DV – but with the objectifying, mechanical yet voyeuristic stare of the surveillance camera.

In this delicate exercise, the enigmatic gaze of the victim of historical amnesia initially comes to resemble the 'fixed and objectified framing' of the oppressor. Yet Haneke also draws on the specific qualities of the HD video image to elaborate an 'aesthetic of amnesia' that effectively denounces a pervasive process of disavowal and stasis aimed at countering the disturbing and dynamic effect of suffering and change.

'Blind spot': the expression aptly describes the treatment of the massacre of 1961 – the event that brought the Algerian war to metropolitan France – and how, until recently, the circumstances of the death of over two hundred people, who had come to march peacefully in Paris in support of the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale), have remained unspoken. Some of the bodies, thrown into the Seine, were

1 Max Silverman, 'Horror and the everyday in post-Holocaust France: *Nuit et Brouillard* and concentrationary art', *French Cultural Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2007), p. 12.

2 Ibid., pp. 7, 13–4.

never found. The expression also applies to the apparatus devised by Haneke to probe the covert effect of the silence and guilt generated, beyond the official censorship, by a nation's collective and individual amnesia.

A well-to-do French family living in a comfortable suburb of Paris is being filmed by a mysterious, hidden observer. This enigmatic presence forces successful literary journalist Georges to revisit forgotten childhood memories and, in particular, forces him to confront the way he brought about the rejection of a six-year-old Algerian orphan whom his parents had been ready to adopt.

The simple and effective device that triggers the story – a series of tapes left on the doorstep – recalls the premiss of another film in which video is the initial means for an exploration of what lurks behind the acceptable surface of everyday life – *Lost Highway* (1997) by David Lynch, himself a master of the depiction of existential unease. While Haneke's aims are more precise in their political underpinning, he similarly revels in exploring the ambiguity of the moving image: the medium of presence is also the medium of absence. 'In spite of the logic of the Euclidian time-space, here, the Mystery Man expresses himself from elsewhere. . . . to go beyond the alternation presence/absence, to play on co-existence (*ibi* and *alibi* combined or reversible) suspends identity'.[3]

In effect, patterns of identification in *Caché* are irremediably blurred from the start. Unravelling on the first images, the film's opening credits create an additional element of familiarity and distance for the spectator. As the images suddenly fast forward a few minutes later, however, those who first discover the film in its DVD version will probably reach for the remote control, thus unwittingly mimicking the actions of the characters, viewers of the film within the film. At the same time, the point of view initially presented to us is that of the anonymous author of the video, but even if we are made to adopt the mysterious observer's position, his or her identity will never be fully ascertained diegetically. Most crucially, the spot from which the images are shot will not be seen. Georges does venture out of his house looking for it and vaguely gestures towards an unseen location, yet the counter-shot never takes place.

Images from the anonymous videos are shown on a flat screen, installed in designer fashion in the centre of the shelves that line the walls of the family living room with an imposing collection of books, videos and DVDs. The video images thus appear literally 'embedded' within the rows of books and films, whose meaning and function they soon call into question: this is a cultivated couple's house (he is the presenter of a literary television programme, she is a book editor) in which texts and images have seemingly lost their power to question, but serve instead as a buffer against the intrusion of unedited external reality. In a similar fashion, the backlit set of Georges's television programme is made up of elegantly patterned rows of replica books – mere props that do not even have titles. As they leave the stage at the end of the show, the silhouettes

3 Guy Astic, 'Call me!: L'Appel des profondeurs? – *Lost Highway* de David Lynch', *Simulacres*, no. 1 (1999), p. 126.

of Georges and his assistant producer are outlined against this background like ghostly figures.

The video image does not so much 'puncture' through this cloak, but rather weaves itself into it, and reveals it for what it is. Cinema's 'inferior' double thus makes its way not only into the diegesis, at the heart of the educated, upper-middle-class home, but into the body of the film itself. At the beginning, when the film first takes us back and forth from the virtual (images of the street shot a few hours before) to the actual (Georges exploring the same street, looking for traces of the mysterious observer), the latter sequences, shot at dusk, appear drained of light, as if vampirized by their video *doppelgänger*.

The result of Haneke choosing to shoot the whole feature in High Definition format is not merely a surface play on the virtual and the actual aimed at building up suspense. It allows for the elaboration of a vision dominated by the numbing power of amnesia – a vision that is not only suited to the film's premiss, but disturbingly characteristic of present-day aesthetics. As we penetrate the house and watch those who inhabit it, it is a universe of rarefied contrasts, soft edges and flattened perspective, a world governed by stasis and the need to relegate the 'contingent and the accidental – the historical, in a word – to the exterior' that emerges.[4] The house's comfortable, tasteful environment functions like an autarchic space, theatrical in the way that it denies depth of field and superimposes muted, controlled variations of beige, brown and grey. Like the domestic space, the workplace is a world of surface effects, mirrors and transparent facades, faintly suffused by an overall greyness and as ultimately depthless as the televised image which it produces.

As the virtual and the actual become enmeshed, it is not, in the more poetic Deleuzian fashion, the past that comes to haunt the present but, rather, almost simultaneous presents that overlap in an uncanny fashion, creating, in the image of the fast-forward effect, 'ripples' on the smooth surface of a comfortable, amnesiac existence.

It is images from a different visual regime that suggest that the events are having a deeper effect on Georges: the dream sequences, the only moments where the past – memory or fantasized reminiscence – resurfaces, are conveyed with the depth of field and visual lyricism that is denied to the rest of the film. In the end, however, we watch him draw the curtains, take a sleeping pill and go to bed: an emphatic way of signifying the closure of an episode, the return to normality – the conclusion of the film. Yet the images 'refuse' to comply: behind the closing credits, the questioning gaze not only persists but affirms its capacity to reinvent itself.

Writing about what he calls the *cinéastes-artistes*, among whom he includes Haneke, Stéphane Bouquet underlines the reductive tendency to subject the creative process to an *a priori* ruling principle:

> First and foremost, their films grow out of an external principle (an idea, a formal bias, an aesthetic device, a Dogma for instance). . . . This

4 Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1999), p. 196.

> is the ultimate truth of an art that substitutes the idea for the world and has to adapt the latter to the first. . . . The real world, inasmuch as it contains the promise of the heterogeneous, the other and the accidental, can only be experienced as threatening.[5]

With *Caché*, both the artificiality of the device that underpins the film's dramatic and formal organization and the fact that similar strategies were already at work in the director's previous films (which are alluded to throughout *Caché*) raised the suspicions of those critics who dismissed the film as yet another exercise in sadistic mise-en-scene. (As *Cahiers du cinéma*'s reviewer has it, 'Like a sadistic child playing with images, Haneke conceals himself, recreating himself as a nightmare for adults'.[6]) On the one hand, however, here, the autarchic dimension created by the film arguably functions as an effective *mise en abyme*: Bouquet's account neatly describes Georges's world as much as Haneke's aesthetic stratagem. On the other hand, Haneke undoubtedly stands among those contemporary filmmakers for whom the medium of the moving image, in the multiple appearances afforded by present-day technology and visual strategies, is not merely a play on representation but an actual process of thought: contemporary realities are thus thought through the operations of film itself, and refracted through the prism of a specific aesthetic vision. (Implicit in *Caché* is also Haneke's acknowledgement of the limitations of his gesture: the gruesome scene of self-immolation by which Georges is confronted is followed by a direct cut to a shot where we see him leave a cinema.) Even if Haneke appears, more than ever, to tread close to the 'easy finger-pointing exercise', I would contend that *Caché* also offers, in Silverman's words, a 'genuinely troubling self-examination for us all'.[7] In the end, the issue lies in the interstice between the emotional force of some of the video footage (such as the forlorn figure of a solitary man crying disconsolately), and the numbing process made visible through the aesthetics of amnesia. Does the emotion which Haneke, in his vision of middle-class France, repeatedly fends off, reach us, the spectators? Emotion – '"the signature of the other", the sign, precisely, "that there is an other and that this other can reach us"'.[8]

5 Stéphane Bouquet, 'De Sorte que tout communique', first published in *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 527 (1998), reprinted in *Théories du cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2001), p. 204 (my translation).

6 Stéphane Rehm, 'Juste sous la surface: *Caché* de Michael Haneke', *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 605 (2005), p. 31 (my translation).

7 Silverman, 'Horror and the everyday', p. 14.

8 Anne Dufourmantelle, *Blind Date: Sexe et Philosophie* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 2003), cited in Robert Maggiori, 'Ne pense qu'à ça', *Libération*, 9 October 2003, p. viii.

Shooting crabs in a barrel

PAUL GILROY

Caché is a positively disturbing film. I have had many rich and stimulating conversations about it and I have appreciated the insistent dialogue it provoked. The value of those conversations also made it difficult to ask for more from the cinematic experience than Michael Haneke offers. However, my intense reaction against his film is also worth exploring briefly here. I felt hostile towards what felt like the film's horrible accommodation with many of the things that it appears, at first sight, to be criticizing. This was not so much a clever study of audience complicity, regression or resignation, but rather a conduit for those depressing reactions served up with what looks like bad faith. The film seemed to offer only a shallow, pseudopolitical, or perhaps more accurately an antipolitical, engagement with profound contemporary problems that deserve – or demand – better treatment than an elaborate exercise in mystification can provide.

What I took to be an overly casual citation of the 1961 anti-Arab pogrom by Papon's police in Paris encapsulated some of these problems. That unmourned and unremembered real event does a lot of narrative work for Haneke. Many people involved in building a habitable multicultural Europe will feel that there are pressing issues of morality and responsibility involved in raising that history only to reduce it to nothing more than a piece of tragic machinery in the fatal antagonism that undoes *Caché's* protagonists. The dead deserve better than that passing acknowledgement. That belated recognition contributes to the

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negative labour involved in building a Europe, which can be reconciled to, and emancipated from, the history of its colonial crimes.

The radical interdependency that characterizes Europe's multicultural cities, the memory and history of France's colonial wars, the continuing debasement of an information-saturated public sphere, the depletion of the bourgeois household and the problems of individual agency involved in being a moral actor in the age of rendition are all important topics worthy of careful consideration. They are rarely linked together. It is all the more unusual to discover a work of art in which racism and the pressure of unresolved colonial violence on the present contribute to the framework through which we are invited to consider their articulation. There is more to all of these urgent matters than the perfidy and shallowness of privileged postmodern Parisians, figured here as an empty exercise akin to the task of shooting crabs in a barrel.

Although there is technical novelty in Haneke's presentation of it, the landscape of Georges's fractured subjectivity is very well trodden ground. When the Majids of this world are allowed to develop into deeper, rounded characters endowed with all the psychological gravity and complexity that is taken for granted in ciphers like Georges, we will know that substantive progress has been made towards breaking the white, bourgeois monopoly on dramatizing the stresses of lived experience in this modernity.

In view of *Caché's* obvious strengths, I was particularly troubled by what could be interpreted as Haneke's collusion with the comforting idea that the colonial native can be made to disappear in an instant through the auto-combustive agency of their own violence. If this reading of Majid's suicide sounds rather too literal, I am prepared immediately to concede that his death represents a step forward from older modernist explorations of the psychological and philosophical ambiguities involved in murdering Arabs, but his eventful sacrifice belongs on ground from which all varieties of political reflection are doomed to disappear. Some years ago, Volker Schlondorff's *Circle of Deceit* (1981) was consumed by similar conceits. Getting the Arabs to do away with themselves is a timely fantasy in the context of today's pervasive Islamophobia. In that light Majid's suicide becomes in effect an exclusively aesthetic event, devoid of all meaning apart from what it communicates about Georges. Haneke's unsettled audience can even derive a deep if guilty pleasure from it precisely because that horrible death can represent a flowering of their own investments in the idea that Europe's immigrants should be induced to disappear by any means possible.

The same aestheticism is built into the misplaced tactic of casting the core narrative as a kind of detective story or whodunit. The modernist warrant supporting that choice is a worthy one. Indeed, this dimension of the film accomplishes the classic trick of interruption. It simultaneously solicits and forbids interpretation. The thwarting of resolution can be instructive, but here it arouses the suspicion that form and phenomenology are more significant than fidelity to the broken world.

The revolutionary and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon once misquoted Nietzsche as saying that 'Man's tragedy is that he was once a child'. That phrase, which is used to illuminate what Fanon called the sociogenesis of racial hierarchy, echoed in my mind as I tried to make sense of the notion that the young Georges – who had lied to his parents in order to engineer the expulsion of his rival from their household – was a culpable moral actor. In what sense are the unintended consequences of his juvenile decision his own responsibility? The horrible shallowness of the adult Georges supplies the context in which that act is interpreted as a prefiguration of his later duplicity, but can and should the child Georges be held to account in that way? This confusion is important. The relationship of the colonial past to the postcolonial present is perverted and confused by the idea that today's complacent and indifferent adults bear no more responsibility for their resignation, inertia and poisonous choices than a conflicted six year old. The unhelpful effects of this rather convenient cop-out are compounded by several other implicit suggestions. Are the structures of Georges's own personality, his unhappy household and his divided nation all homologically configured? Are the guilt, denial and repression that operate in each of those spaces in the same essential shape and tempo? Are the same kind of pathological results produced in each of those settings? For a film which seems to offer a small fragment of liberating hope in the closing shots, in which some kind of mysterious amity between Pierrot and Majid's son suggests that they may have evaded the patterns established by the previous generation, the refusal to allow the child Georges a similar access to a hopeful innocence is jarring.

Since Fanon, we have known that colonialism brings out the worst in everyone it touches. *Caché* offers precious little beyond that simple insight. We leave the theatre jolted but with no clear sense of how to act more justly or ethically. Instead, Haneke invites his audience to become resigned to its shame, discomfort and melancholia. These are the inescapable effects of an overarching historical Leviathan that becomes intelligible only through interpersonal conduct. This tragic machinery defies the desire for control. The old twentieth-century message, namely that there is relief only in the dubious pleasures of atelic art, is repeated. Another world, it would seem, is not possible.

From Rue Morgue to Rue des Iris

RANJANA KHANNA

The 'Rue Morgue' of my title refers to an 1841 detective story by Edgar Allen Poe entitled 'The murders in the Rue Morgue'.[1] The story entails the detection of a non-human murderer. Dealing with the relation between animality and criminality, the crux of the plot involves audible but ambiguous animal cries that give no articulate testimony, but suggest pure affect and the difficulty of distinguishing an animal cry from a word uttered in a foreign language. If the mysterious world of detective fiction dominated Poe's Rue Morgue and the 'extraordinary murders' that took place there with the aid of a razor slash to the throat, it is rather the absence of detection that shapes Haneke's Rue des Iris in a disturbing thriller without a clear-cut crime (but nonetheless with a cut to the throat). The key question that confronts Haneke's film is the following: what, exactly, is *caché*?

There are two frame narratives to Poe's story.[2] The first involves a treatise on analytical powers and on the ingenuity of calculation that requires careful observation and the employment of memory. The second tells us of the relationship between our narrator and his unstoppable protagonist, C. Auguste Dupin, an avid reader and observer of all details, such that at times he can mind-read. 'Books . . . were his sole luxuries, and in Paris these are easily obtained'.[3] We soon come to understand, as we move into the main body of the story, that he is also an expert in reading the signs of a crime without attributing any particular motive to the logical connections that link these signs together. Dupin pieces together a possible narrative out of the resources available in the newspaper story that initiates the plot. Immediately, detection is associated with reading and with adequate interpretive skills. Dupin demonstrates that the sounds described in the testimonies given, rather than the assumed meanings of those sounds and stories, is essential.

1 Edgar Allen Poe, 'The murders in the Rue Morgue', in *Edgar Allen Poe Stories: Twenty Seven Thrilling Tales by the Master of Suspense with an Added Selection of his Best Poems* (New York, NY: Platt and Munk, 1961), pp. 161–214.

2 The issue of frame narrative in Poe's works has been extensively discussed by Marie Bonaparte, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Barbara Johnson and others in John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (eds), *The Purloined Poe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

3 Poe, 'The murders in the Rue Morgue', p. 166.

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Eschewing a content-driven explanation, Dupin allows for the possibility of an arbitrary murder rather than a carefully plotted one. The human associated with the crime may not be directly guilty. However, as Dupin says, 'I am now awaiting a person who, although perhaps not the perpetrator of these butcheries, must have been in some measure implicated in their perpetration. Of the worst portion of the crimes committed, it is probable that he is innocent.'[4] This unwitting accomplice to the crime is a swarthy Mediterranean sailor from Malta. He is guilty, by association, of a larger economic crime than the one for which he may stand trial. Meanwhile, the aptly named M. Le Bon has been wrongly accused of the sailor's crime. The main perpetrator of the crime first manifests itself not through any visual evidence but through voice as evidence.[5] Various witnesses report that they heard screams and then two voices – one gruff and the other shrill. The gruff voice (ultimately revealed to be that of the Maltese sailor) seems to have uttered 'Mon Dieu'. Witnesses of different European nations and national languages claim the second voice sounded foreign, and each conjectures that it was a European language, but one that they did not know. 'How strangely unusual must that voice have really been, about which such testimony as this could have been elicited! – in whose tones, even, denizens of the five great divisions of Europe could recognise nothing familiar! You will say that it might have been the voice of an Asiatic – of an African. Neither Asiatics nor Africans abound in Paris.'[6] The foreign voice (which we too may have suspected was from the Antilles, La Réunion or Algeria, given the time frame and process of elimination in the story and its other colonial references) is revealed ultimately to be that of a non-human, an orangutan, in fact. Voice as distinct from language becomes the crucial marker of the trace of the animal rather than the human. Dupin identifies the beast through his reading of Cuvier, and through the beast from Borneo's digital calling-card, its finger or paw prints, which continue to exist beyond the presence of the animal itself, and which can be understood through a technology of reading the evidence. The orangutan's agency was also revealed by non-human agility and strength, which Dupin deduced from the escape route and the bodily marks left by the ferocity of the attack.

In imitation of a human and in the process of losing its animal nature, the orangutan committed a shocking violence as it cut the older woman's throat. The beast went into a frenzy at the sight of spurting blood. ('Razor in hand, and fully lathered, it (the orangutan) was sitting before a looking-glass, attempting the operation of shaving, in which it had no doubt previously watched its master through the key-hole of the closet. . . . (It) was flourishing the razor about her face, in imitation of the motions of a barber. . . .'[7]) Other pieces of visual evidence proved apparently incidental: 'Napoleons, an ear-ring of topaz, three large silver spoons, three smaller of *métal d'Alger*, and two bags, containing nearly four thousand francs in gold',[8] all bear the traces of colonial encounter, but their significance to the crime is not directly relevant, unless, that is,

4 Ibid., p. 188.

5 My understanding of voice has been shaped by Mladen Dolar's *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.)

6 Poe, 'The murders in the Rue Morgue', p. 190–1.

7 Ibid., pp. 210, 212.

8 Ibid., p. 174.

one reads the presence of the orangutan as part of this same colonial machinery that would 'implicate' the colonial endeavour and those who perpetuate it without directly supplying clues for the immediate crime at hand. However, the scenario and all the suspicions involved speak to a world of global encounter, empire and the riches and prejudices which accompanied it.

So why start with Poe to think about Haneke's 2005 film *Caché*? There are perhaps a few obvious parallels. The two most shocking images of ferocity in the movie involve an animal and a reference to one. The child Majid's beheading of the cockerel is represented in Georges's dream as a threatening act. Majid is covered with blood and carries a disproportionately sized axe that becomes the threatening weapon, which, in turn, could be wielded against him (the boy Georges). The other most shocking image in the film is that of spurting blood from the suicidal adult Majid's neck. This spurt of blood references the dream, and Majid's rapid twisted fall to the floor reduces him to body, and reveals his life to be almost non-human, like the severed body of the cockerel. He is little more than the trace of the disappearing human. Indeed, his movements show less life than even the headless cockerel, which seems to have the power to shock in Georges's dream world for longer than Majid the man. Whereas for Poe the trace of the animal seems to reference the foreigner, for Haneke, the animal becomes the trace of the human and the foreigner. Akira Lippit importantly reminds us of Adorno's suggestion that:

> Indignation over cruelty diminishes in proportion as the victims are less like normal readers, the more they are swarthy, 'dirty', dago-like. This throws as much light on the crimes as on the spectators. . . . The mechanism of 'pathic projection' determines that those in power perceive as human only their own reflected image, instead of reflecting back the human as precisely what is different. Murder is thus the repeated attempt, by greater madness, to distort the madness of such false perception into reason: what was not seen as human and yet is human, *is made a thing*, so that its stirrings can no longer refute the manic gaze.[9]

Lippit explains that:

> The ethics of murder is made possible by seeing the animal first as nonhuman, then inhuman. If one's victim can be seen as inhuman, the aggressor reasons, one is then justified in performing acts of violence, even murder upon that inhuman body, since those acts now fall beyond the jurisdiction of the anthropocentric law.[10]

The inhuman, as the trace of the animal, is dropped into the film again and again. The inhuman and the animal are drawn together through pathic projection, and the affective side of the human that itself is like an automaton, sets the human aside from itself. Pierrot, the son of Anne and Georges, reads *Chien-de-la-lune*, and at a dinner party, the guests are

9 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), p. 105.

10 See Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 168–9.

regaled with a story of an old woman who believes that one of these very guests was the reincarnation of her disappearing animal, the dog. The affect associated with her memory, and with others', is the trace of the non-human projected onto a human figure, itself in the process of disappearing.

The apparently arbitrary evidence found scattered around the apartment of Madame and Mademoiselle Espanaye in Poe's story reveals another connection between the story and the film. The miscellaneous evidence in the apartment in the Poe story contains the spoons of *métal d'Alger* – a tin–lead alloy that gives the false appearance of silver. If metal is referenced with the razor, it seems to have a potential (false yet resonant) relation to that of the metal spoon, which encrypts a secret relation to Algeria.

In the film, the hidden secret also refers to the spectacle of the Algerian war and the public secret of the massacre of 17 October 1961. Algerians were thrown into the Seine as they protested peacefully against a night-time curfew imposed by the French government in response to the violent struggle for independence in Algeria. (The war ultimately resulted in independence and the death of between 100,000 and 150,000 French and 800,000 and 1,500,000 Algerians.) In *caché*, we are informed that this was the site of Majid's parents' murder, in which, one could say, following Dupin, that all the French are implicated, if not directly responsible. It is also a secret (the *caché*) that has been established as spectacular in current thinking about film and the 'trauma' associated with the war. Initially, the fear of technology revealing the essence of French violence in relation to Algerians resulted in the banning of films such as Jacques Panijel's *Octobre à Paris* (1961), which was seized by the French authorities on its first screening. Some newspaper journalists, along with Panijel and Jean-Paul Sartre, organized protests concerning the coverup. The authorities had such powers as a result of emergency laws from 1955 that allowed authorities to censor, restrict movement and impose curfews. In 2005, following the suburban riots in France, these emergency laws were invoked once again. Although ultimately unsuccessful, there was also an attempt to censor the negative side of French colonialism.[11]

Numerous films have now been made revealing the extensive coverup by the police of both the massacre and the violent policies of Maurice Papon, who was in charge of the French police at the time, and had been an official in the Vichy regime. (His long career in politics came to an end in 1998 when he was convicted for 'crimes against humanity' committed during his Vichy years. Amnesty laws concerning the Algerian war would protect him from any conviction relating to his propagation of and participation in violence at that time.) Films documenting the massacre include Philip Brooks and Alan Hayling's documentary *Drowning By Bullets* (1992) and Alain Tasma's docudrama *Nuit noire, 17 octobre 1961* (2005). Once, film technology that could assist in revealing the hidden truth was banned. However, technology itself has the effect of

11 See *LOI no. 2005-158 du 23 février 2005 portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés.* The law demanded that schoolteachers present a positive view of French colonialism. The law was extremely controversial and was ultimately repealed by Chirac.

drawing attention not only to the bareness of humanity, but also to the inhuman contained within it. On the other side of nature, and as a departure from the human's animal trace, technology, as Heidegger reminds us, can also begin to enframe, in an inhuman manner, life as spectacle.[12] Indeed, the affect associated with the trauma of the Algerian war has currently dominated what has become a kind of surplus enjoyment of that foundational trauma, played out as spectacle and often resulting in extraordinary projections of resentment, shame and guilt – just as in *Caché*.

If analytical skills are theorized in Poe's first frame narrative along with a lesson in reading, books also play an important part in Haneke's film, even if the reading of them seems less important than their appearance and circulation. Although Dupin gives us a lesson in reading, Georges is the anchor of a television literary talk show, and the backdrop for that show is a simulacrum of books on shelves, which in turn echoes visually the living room of Georges and Anne within which there are books, a large television screen and videotapes. Anne is an editor in a publishing house and has recently published a book on globalization. At the book launch, discussions can be overheard about the literary scene and indeed theorists of simulacra, including Jean Baudrillard. Life and its simulacrum frequently collapse into each other and the book as technology of knowing is represented as its own trace. When Georges asks about a screenplay a friend is writing, the question is misunderstood with a shadow of guilt – 'what's it about, this scenario?' is interpreted (or rather projected) as an accusation. What is this performance? Who are those with a guilty conscience (in this instance Pierre and Anne)? What is being played out? Later, Anne thinks Pierrot is accusing her of having an affair with Pierre.

The function of the frame narrative that we saw in Poe's story is transformed and becomes non-narrative in Haneke's film. There is no lesson or anything in particular to be discovered in the disturbingly long establishing shots. They seem to suggest that we should look for something, or investigate in the manner in which we have been taught to read. And yet in *Caché*, there is only emptiness and spectacle. Even the name of the road gives us no real clue, but returns us to spectacle once more: the Rue des Iris refers us back simply to the mechanism of the eyeballs. Looking at looking, the camera on the Rue des Iris scans the technology of looking itself. The different technologies of analysis and knowing reflect a different moment in the technology of Being and dwelling, as Heidegger describes it: the world in which one understands 'I am' as 'I dwell' is set off-balance within the era of global movement.[13]

There are numerous frames to *Caché* as there are to Poe's story, suggesting a kernel at its heart. The kernel is presented as the guilt and subsequent anxiety experienced by Georges as a result of a lie he told to his parents as a young boy concerning Majid vomiting blood and threatening him with an axe. The lie had huge consequences for Majid. Georges's parents had planned to adopt him and give him a good education, but the lie meant Majid was sent to an orphanage and grew up

12 See Martin Heidegger, 'The question concerning technology', in David Farrell Krell (ed.), *Basic Writings* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 319–40.

13 See Heidegger, 'Building, dwelling, thinking', in *Basic Writings*, pp. 319–39.

with few opportunities. Georges experiences this memory through dreams initially, and one could say that these dreams reveal yet another layer beneath them, that of a threat against Georges's boyhood. Georges's adult anxiety is revealed in a dream about a boyhood castration anxiety involving Majid. The affect associated with the anxiety in the dream is realized with the headless chicken, as if anxiety, castration and the inhuman all set the human aside and render it unable to dwell in himself. Georges, in a pathic projection, dreams of himself as suffering the same fate as the chicken. In fact, the childhood guilt gives the appearance in the film of the kernel, and yet the subsequent frames of the film shed some doubt on this diegetic psychologizing. The plot takes Georges's anxiety as the essence of his, and indeed the diegesis's, Being, which is once again set aside from itself through the technology of dreaming, seeing and filming. No comfortable dwelling seems possible as the 'inhuman' technology sets 'I am' against itself.

The title asks us to investigate that which is hidden, as if we are given a layered narrative or scenario with a latent content to be deciphered, which is the ultimate secret behind the narrative and the affect associated with it. After looking for something in the establishing shot, there is also the attempt to find something hidden in Anne, whose face is concealed from us in the first few minutes of her presence onscreen as if the camera itself is so self-absorbed that it cannot look at another. Similarly, we look to the transition shots for meaning – the passages in the swimming pool that punctuate the film introduce anxiety. Like Dupin's witnesses who see threat as the foreign everywhere, we look for meaning in voices, for example, in the acousmatic manifestation of the swimming instructor's voice that becomes menacing for no reason as we wonder whether it, or some other inhuman source, may in fact be the source of the surveillance itself. Unlike in Dupin's world, Asiatics and Africans do abound. The technology of filmmaking itself – the inhuman technology of spectacle making – asks us to investigate through surfaces something which ultimately has no depth, but is rather propelled on the level of the signifier to guard against the knowledge of the source of the secret. Perhaps, Majid has no interest in Georges at all and is entirely without the ability to either castrate or accuse, and perhaps all life is enframed. That may be what the ultimate secret really is.

Georges's anxiety functions to constitute a claustrophobic diegetic world in which anxiety dominates and comes to shape and give arbitrary meaning to everything that occurs. The French experience of Algeria and its war as hidden spectacle and spectacularized guilt – the stuff of dinner-party conversations – is self-absorbed surplus enjoyment. This renders the Algerians once again as a menacing cause of this anxiety. Algerians in the film can only deny their part in a narrative that has already given them roles that justify accusation and criminalization. There is nothing to indicate their guilt in the film other than Georges's own projections. Rather, there is some reference to the fact that the spectacle of violence that structures French fear and summons the spectacular violence of the

Algerian war absolves the French of guilt once again. Here, the presence of postmodern surfaces and the thematization of surveillance, this time attributed to Algerians in spite of the surveillance mechanisms used against Algerians by the French, unfolds a narrative of revenge in which a camera gaze is returned in an oppositional structure. This has been documented widely, but appears in films such as *The Battle of Algiers* (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966), in which part of the film is repeated from another angle by surveillance cameras. In fact, Georges is the only figure who can manipulate or cut and splice images. His dreams, his video-lined lounge, his career which is both to host and to edit programmes and the world in which he lives, show him to possess the power of cutting (whether film, a throat, or a spectacle) more than anyone else in the film. (Anne, too, is an editor/publisher of books, but not of film or of any other visual media.) The surveillance camera that documents Georges's dwelling and then his movements, and the images and postcards that arrive from nowhere, seem to show the inhuman – technologized, affective and indeed the animal side of Georges – as their source, and also the source of the 'crime' of surveillance itself. The camera is never decoded.

So *Caché* is ultimately a film about anxiety in relation to a history of colonial violence and the technology associated with it. Paradoxically given the different regime of seeing and technology of knowing that abounds in Poe's story, *Murders at the Rue Morgue* gives us a clue to the source of the 'crime' which becomes, as in Poe, the inhuman in multiple frames of understanding. Both story and film document the fear of intrusion into dwelling. If the narrative frame in the story suggested depth and reflection on reading, the frames of the film suggest surface tension and force-fields in which the accused Algerian is fundamental and yet entirely irrelevant to the production of anxiety and the image. The image becomes saturated with spectacle, rendering the Algerians relevant only in their relation to Georges's bourgeois late capitalist anxiety, an affect bound by its lack of content and pathic projection in which that which disturbs one's dwelling, whether foreigner, affect, technology or animal, becomes the inhuman.

The trace of Algeria in this world of late capitalist globalization is figured as a projection once again, as if there was not a larger story in which all French are implicated, even if ultimately innocent of the specific crime. Georges's boyhood lie, after all, is a simple and rather typical lie of a child – not criminal in itself – but nonetheless has huge consequences. But as a film about anxiety, Georges's boyhood lie is stressed as an innocent mistake around which a huge anxiety and guilt has been built as if to shore up, with indignation, an aggressive being and the right to a comfortable dwelling. And the larger implication of France's relation to Algeria and its continued violence against Franco-Algerians is left unaddressed, as Majid's and his son's own roles are entirely defined once again by the strength of the inhuman anxiety of Georges and the French spectators. Georges can make the final cut and

write Majid's suicide into the script as if it were Majid's refusal of Georges and a threat to him once again. Georges as editor is naively identified with the position of the other, but Georges as self-selected victim is always in fear of Majid's putative power to castrate. Majid lives on in Georges's world as the undead, or the inhuman, even if he has actually been sacrificed as the all-too-human victim to Georges's unstoppable anxiety and colonial guilt.

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The empire looks back

MAX SILVERMAN

Frantz Fanon's classic anticolonial text *The Wretched of the Earth*[1] ends with a number of case studies of Algerian patients with mental disorders. Fanon presents the views of French psychiatrists who attribute these disorders to the congenital behaviour of Algerians. He subsequently exposes this 'science' as a European mystification of the truth: the real cause of these neuroses, he tells us, is the historically specific situation of colonialism. Fanon's technique, here and elsewhere in his anticolonial writings, is to train the eye on the colonizer in the process of looking at the colonized in order to expose the psychosexual fears and fantasies on which that gaze is premissed and their alienating effects on colonizer and colonized.

Michael Haneke's film *Caché/Hidden* operates, loosely, in a way similar to Fanon in that it reverses the gaze of the western colonizer and exposes the hidden fears and fantasies still at play today in a postcolonial re-run of the colonial encounter. As the protagonist, Georges, is forced to confront that forgotten moment in his childhood when he betrayed the young Algerian boy, Majid, a set of assumptions about the behaviour of Algerians similar to those of the French psychiatrists described by Fanon rises to the surface. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon says the following of the western imago of the Algerian: 'Every colony tends to turn into a huge farmyard, where the only law is that of the knife'[2]; 'The Algerian kills savagely.. . .The Algerian, you are told, needs to feel warm blood, and to bathe in the blood of his victim.. . . A certain number of magistrates go so far as to say that the reason why an Algerian kills a man is primarily and above all in order to slit his throat'[3]; 'the Algerian is a congenital impulsive'[4]; the Algerian is 'a prey to melancholia' and conforms to the type that could potentially commit suicide (except the Algerian takes his violence out on others rather than himself)[5]; in 'a

1 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1966).

2 Ibid., p. 249.

3 Ibid., pp. 240–1.

4 Ibid., p. 242.

5 Ibid.

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world divided into compartments' in which 'the native is a being hemmed in . . . his dreams are of action and of aggression. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, climbing.'[6] Uncannily, the imago of the Algerian which returns to haunt Georges's mind is composed of the same elements.

The impression created by this image echoing across the decades is that liberal bourgeois life today is but a thin veneer covering archaic stereotypes transmitted unthinkingly from generation to generation. Indeed, there is clear evidence in the film that Georges's unconscious is inhabited by a common set of beliefs about Algerians. As a child of six in 1961, at the height of the Algerian war of independence, Georges seems to know instinctively that the best lie that he can tell his parents to persuade them to send Majid away rather than adopt him is that Majid has been spitting blood and that he cut off the head of the cockerel with an axe in the farmyard, covering himself in the bird's blood in the process, in order to scare him (Georges). In the first of Georges's dreams in which this episode is relived, Majid is seen approaching the young Georges with axe raised about to wreak his bloody revenge. Why this particular story about the Algerian, if not because there is a common fear, passed down from nation to individual and parent to child, that Algerians, in Fanon's words, kill savagely, live by the knife and need to feel warm blood? Georges will interpret Majid's suicide (the culmination of slit throats and spurting blood depicted in the child-like drawings) as Majid's revenge for the treatment he received forty years before rather than the mirror-image of his own (and his nation's) racialized projection. What returns to haunt Georges are his, and his country's, stereotyped fears and fantasies of the Algerian buried deep within the French national psyche whose most profoundly repressed moment is 17 October 1961, when these fears spilled over into naked aggression by the French forces of law and order on the streets of Paris, resulting in the slaughter of at least 120 peacefully demonstrating Algerians. In terms of the film's narrative, it is implied that Majid's parents were two of the victims of this massacre.[7]

However, if these fears and fantasies resemble those of the European settlers in Algeria at the time of the war of independence (1954–62), Haneke's deorientalizing treatment of the return of this particular repressed highlights significant differences too. The same image returns in a very different context. Since the end of the Algerian war, the world has moved on. Liberal bourgeois France has renounced its colonial aspirations and retreated behind high walls to adopt a defensive position. The most effective way now to keep that troubling world at bay and to preserve a secure identity is no longer to civilize the bloodthirsty savages in the colonial 'farmyard' and reduce the other to the same, but rather to keep the other out altogether (and, to adopt Julia Kristeva's terms, to keep worrying otherness out of the self).[8] As a visual sign of the new gated community constructed to keep difference at bay, Georges's and Anne's house is raised off the ground, barred by a high gate and obscured by a large bush at ground level, with only a side door as exit and entrance.

6 Ibid., p. 41.

7 For the most detailed analysis of this event to date, see Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

8 Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988).

Intrusions into this zone of security are either met with anger (Georges's reaction to the black male cyclist who almost knocks him down as he crosses the road), liberal diplomacy (Anne's reaction to the same incident) or the exoticization of difference (the token black female friend at the dinner party), all different ways of neutralizing the other.

In the postmodern climate of contemporary France, the device *par excellence* for screening out the real is the image. Hence, Georges, as a television presenter at work and the proud owner of a huge television monitor at home, projects images onto the world and receives them as part of his domestic decor without ever being troubled by either. His home is a vast array of book covers, which also forms the backdrop to his television literary chat show. Like well-chosen wallpaper, this projects an image of intellectual depth. Georges is shown editing his programme, splicing up the real to make it more accessible to his bourgeois audience. After witnessing Majid's suicide, he instinctively disappears into the darkened space of the cinema, presumably to allow the flickering images to efface harsh realities. Just like the lies he constantly tells Anne, his life is an illusion of secure identity.

Caché deals more with techniques of repression today than with the idea of an unconscious atavistic national reflex about Algerians. It demonstrates how the new defensive identities of contemporary bourgeois France, which efface troubling differences and questions of responsibility, are particularly dependent on the image which smoothes out reality's jagged edges. In the anticolonial moment of the postwar period, Fanon's solution to destroying the European power zone was violent insurrection. In the postcolonial moment of the new millennium, it is more a question of disturbing the comfort zone of bourgeois everyday life. Haneke appears to suggest, paradoxically, that if the image is central to preserving this comfort zone, it is also central to piercing the new defences. Haneke plays on the ambiguous nature of the image and the gaze: on the one hand, they domesticate, normalize, exoticize and objectify the world for easy consumption; on the other hand, they have the power to unsettle this new form of voyeurism. Techniques of surveillance were formerly instruments of power used to control and oppress others, especially in the hands of the French army at the time of the Algerian war. Their generalization today might be an essential element in defending the gated community against the other; but they can also be used to put under surveillance the very people who formerly controlled the cameras. Today we are all objects of someone else's gaze and, because of the endless circulation of images, often incapable of fixing its source. No matter how many times Georges and Anne fast-forward or rewind the tapes, no matter how thorough their investigation into the motive for sending the tapes or the identity of the perpetrator, their privacy has been invaded by unknown forces. Similarly, the ubiquity of the image today inevitably allows traumatic moments across the globe to penetrate the privacy of the home, as killings in the Middle East are visible on the television screen in Georges's and Anne's sitting

room while the domestic drama of the disappearance of their son Pierrot is played out. The image may be a fundamental part of the apparatus of repression, but it is also the key which can unlock the gate of the bourgeois comfort zone by straddling the illusory line between public and private space.

Haneke's technique to breach the world of simulacra is to establish multiple ripples in the smooth surface of the image. Hence, the film slips constantly between video and the 'real', between dream and the 'real', between the 'real' and its defamiliarization as the film we are watching as spectators and between different points of view across all these levels. These slippages challenge Georges's and Anne's purchase on reality and truth, and our own. They fragment a safe world (especially the safe world of the cinema as spectacle) and, in the process, open up a violent and disordered space beyond our control. The three moments in the film when Georges retires to his bed in order to banish anxiety all exemplify this. In the first, when Georges visits his mother in the family home, the safety of that environment is disturbed by his nightmare which contains the gruesome image of the young Majid decapitating the cockerel and then advancing on him watching from the shadows; in the second, when Georges returns home after Majid's suicide and withdraws into the darkened space of his bedroom, the hermetically sealed zone of security signified by his voyeuristic peep at the street outside through the drawn curtains (seeing but not seen) is subverted by the receding camera in the room which catches him in the act of looking; thirdly, when he returns home early from work after his aggressive confrontation with Majid's son and retires once again to his darkened bedroom to curl up naked under the covers in foetal position, the camera trained on him (like the hidden camera(s) trained on him throughout) once again denies the impermeability of that space, breaks the voyeur's illusion of power and, as Catherine Wheatley observes, introduces questions of self-awareness and responsibility.[9] Haneke seems to suggest that the way to penetrate the closed world of the contemporary 'wallpaper' generation, who can no longer distinguish between the image and the world, is to puncture the security of the image itself. The image as anaesthetic then transforms into the image as challenge to 'homeland security'.

Haneke is dealing, therefore, not only with the European's orientalist gaze dissected by Fanon but also with the techniques by which that gaze is both perpetuated and challenged forty years after the bitter war of Algerian independence. *Caché* is a commentary on a France (at least in the form of Georges) so incapable of dealing with difference unless it is kept strictly at arms-length, and so anaesthetized against its own guilt and responsibility in relation to past events, that only a dismantling of the erected barricades will open up hidden truths.

However, Haneke's contemporary parable of Franco-Algerian relations may suggest, too, that Georges and Anne are not to be read as an allegory of France but only of a certain generation and class of French men and women. Georges's mother, as the proprietor of a large *domaine*

9 Catherine Wheatley, 'Secrets, lies and videotape', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2006), pp. 32–6.

somewhere in the heart of what is known as *la France profonde*, has completely erased the 'bad memory' of that 'unpleasant' time forty years ago. She does not even remember who Majid is. Georges, metropolitan bourgeois liberal, is at least troubled by the memory when it returns, even if his reaction to something so profoundly repressed is first aggression, then denial (*je ne suis pas responsable* he shouts defiantly at Majid's son in a stark echo of the concentration camp guards in Alain Resnais's Holocaust film *Night and Fog* [1955]) and finally a metaphorical return to the womb. But Pierrot does not seem to share the same reflexes as his parents or grandmother. The drawings trigger no memories and have no associations for him; he appears uncomprehending as to why his father has sent him one of the drawings at school (unless, of course, he is not telling the truth). He seems suffocated by the embrace of his parents (he pushes his mother away when she tries to hold him) and indifferent to their 'gated' bourgeois values, hence his passion for swimming (which, remembering Fanon's words again, is the response of a 'being hemmed in'), his disappearance from the family home and, in the last image, his conversation with Majid's son outside the school. The same generation gap seems to characterize the respective responses of Majid and his son. Majid's reaction to a France which continues to treat him like a dangerous terrorist, issues threats and locks him up is to commit suicide. His son, however, is vigorous and unfazed by Georges's aggression. Majid's son and Pierrot appear to see the world not through the orientalist iconography of their parents' generation but in a more open way. Although we do not know what the conversation between the two young men is about in the final scene, one possible interpretation is that the colonial barriers and atavistic reflexes of previous generations may be loosening through dialogue and a new attitude to difference. Could it be that the multidimensional role of the image today signifies the demise of the controlling gaze by which the West has maintained its mastery over others?

Fanon's response to what he defined as the 'manicheism delirium'[10] of self and other constructed by western colonialism was a reverse manicheism in which the other takes his bloody revenge. Paul Gilroy rightly points out that Fanon erects 'a binary code almost as pernicious as the manichean dualism that he sought to supplant'.[11] *Caché* offers some hope that the 'infernal circle'[12] of the colonial paradigm may be broken by the dialogue and shifting perspectives of a postcolonial paradigm.

10 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), p. 183.

11 Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 248.

12 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 116.

Drawing trauma: visual testimony in *Caché* and *J'ai 8 ans*

GUY AUSTIN

debate

The Algerian War (1954–1962) is a trauma that runs through the recent social and cultural histories of France and Algeria, and which has also punctuated the film histories of those countries. For years after independence the only officially sanctioned topic of Algerian national cinema, the 'undeclared war' has been more marginal within French film, but has received much recent attention. The most talked about example of this is Michael Haneke's *Caché* (2005) – as the recent *Screen* dossier testifies.[1] By and large, the approach taken in the dossier reflects the more general critical reception of *Caché*: a fascination with Haneke's formal and ontological experimentation via point of view, the video image and the interpellation of the audience. Certain contributors also raised the political and ethical issues dependent on the film's postcolonial context and the historical trauma it evoked. None of the analyses, however, mobilized trauma theory or looked in any depth at the function of the drawings (as opposed to the video images) within the film. It is my contention that the drawing of trauma is a crucial issue explored in *Caché* and one which relates the film back to contemporary accounts of the Algerian War by child witnesses. To modify Martine Beugnet's assertion, I would suggest that the inscription of trauma in the body of *Caché* is achieved via the drawings (rather than the video image).[2]

The end of the war was initially constructed as a clean break that ended the colonial period of history. Hence, the Evian accords stated that no-one could be tried for crimes committed in the war, and 'Algeria embodied then the myth of a pure historical rupture'.[3] To the accords were added further laws in 1964, 1974 and 1983, forming 'a sort of chain

1 *Screen*, vol. 48, no. 2 (2007), pp. 211–49.

2 Martine Beugnet, 'Blind spot', *Screen*, vol. 48, no. 2 (2007), p. 227.

3 Françoise Vergès, 'Memories and names of Algeria', *Parallax 7: Translating Algeria* (April–June 1998), p. 89.

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of amnesia'.[4] In fact, these amnesties only assured the return of those traumas they repressed: 'Memory has crossed the sea, so that everything that was not resolved in Algeria is now reappearing in France'.[5] A new name has recently been given to this crossing over of memory from Algeria then to France now: that of *la fracture coloniale* or the colonial schism. In 2005 a collection of essays was published under that title as a response to the ongoing haunting of French society by its colonial past. Like the Vichy syndrome before it, *la fracture coloniale* is *un passé qui ne passe pas* [a past which cannot pass],[6] a past which cannot be overcome and which is under a process of renegotiation and selective remembering. Witness the controversial law of 23 February 2005, Article 3 of which required that 'School syllabi recognize in particular the positive role of the French presence overseas, especially in North Africa'. In their introductory essay, the editors of *La Fracture coloniale* trace this revisionism back to the mid 1990s and notably to President Chirac's celebration on 11 November 1996 of 'the importance and the richness of France's achievement over there, of which it is proud'.[7] In tandem with this emphasis on the positive is a continuing reluctance to address the negative consequences of colonialism, and a hysterical reaction to manifestations of cultural or racial difference such as the 'affaire de Creil' of 1989 and the subsequent polemics surrounding the headscarf. It is in this context of fear, of hauntings, of repressed memories and of renegotiated meanings pertaining to the French colonial project in Algeria, that *Caché* will be explored.

In addition to these issues of context, I shall consider the film in terms of trauma theory, especially insofar as it concerns the visualization of trauma. Deriving for the most part from critical engagement with testimony of the Holocaust, and to a lesser extent from debates regarding narratives of abuse, trauma theory has developed principally in the USA over the last two decades. It has contributed to what some see as the return of the body, of emotion, and potentially also of politics, to the domain of theory from whence these concerns had been exiled by deconstruction: 'Was deconstruction a screen that masked emotion and the body – aspects of life that trauma theory helped to reintroduce?'.[8] From Shoshana Felman's and Dori Laub's groundbreaking book *Testimony* onwards,[9] trauma theory has tended to concentrate on the notion of bearing witness. In her recent work *Trauma Culture*, Kaplan describes witnessing as the production of 'a deliberate ethical consciousness', implying a 'framework that has to do with public recognition of atrocities'. Writing in part as a reaction to 9/11, E. Ann Kaplan establishes the concept of the 'vicarious trauma' experienced by the reader or the viewer when confronted with trauma narratives, and seeks to distinguish between the effect of witnessing, which 'involves not just empathy and motivation to help, but understanding of the structure of injustice', and what she terms the 'empty empathy', which tends to be 'elicited by images of suffering provided without a context or background knowledge'.[10]

4 Benjamin Stora, 'Quand une mémoire (de guerre) peut en cacher une autre (coloniale)', in Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard and Sandrine Lemaire (eds), *La Fracture coloniale: la société française au prisme de l'héritage colonial* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005), p. 58. My translation.

5 Benjamin Stora, 'L'absence d'images déréalise l'Algérie' [interview], *Cahiers du cinéma*, Spécial Algérie (February 2003), p. 12. My translation.

6 Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard and Sandrine Lemaire, 'Introduction: la fracture coloniale: une crise française', in Bancel et al. (eds), *La Fracture coloniale*, p. 30. My translation. This is a reference to Eric Conan and Henry Rousso's *Vichy: un passé qui ne passe pas*, a study of 1990s representations of the Occupation in France, published in English as *Vichy: an Ever-Present Past* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 1998).

7 Bancel et al., 'Introduction', p. 18. My translation.

8 E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: the Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), p. 35.

9 Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (London: Routledge, 1992).

10 Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, pp. 122, 22, 93.

In her own theory of trauma, Cathy Caruth replaces the Freudian term 'repression' with the phrase 'inherent latency' in order to stress the time delay in operation within traumatic experience: 'since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time'.[11] Although not in agreement with Caruth's theory as a whole, Ruth Leys has observed that there is a strand within what she calls the 'genealogy of trauma', according to which trauma 'refuses to be represented *as past*, but is perpetually reexperienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present'.[12] Thomas Elsaesser's suggestion, that 'accepting the latency hypothesis as significant for trauma' might explain the 'nature of the delays' behind the making of films on the Holocaust, might also be applied to the recent, belated glut of French films on the Algerian War.[13] Certainly we can observe a sense of latency, a temporal and spatial shift, a reexperiencing of the past as present, in the reappearance of traumas from the Algerian War outside the boundaries of that conflict in the films under analysis here: in the Tunisian refugee camp of *J'ai 8 ans* (which I discuss below) and in the postcolonial Paris of *Caché*. Both films can also be seen to illustrate Kaplan's assertion of 'the match between the visuality common to traumatic symptoms (flashbacks, hallucinations, dreams) and the ways in which visual media like cinema become the means through which a culture can unconsciously address its traumatic hauntings'[14] – although the extent to which each film's engagement with postcolonial trauma remains unconscious is debatable.

In *Caché*, the protagonist Georges (Daniel Auteuil) embodies the denial that has operated within French society in regard to Algeria. He is an allegorical figure whose personal demons represent the cultural phenomenon of *la fracture coloniale*, a personification of Kaplan's view that 'the impact of past crimes in a nation-state may evidence itself in the form of "cultural symptoms" analogous to those in individuals'.[15] Georges incarnates postcolonial France: guilty, in denial, fearful, yet also powerful and violently assertive. As Haneke has suggested in interview, it really does not matter who is terrorizing Georges and his family. Even if Majid (Maurice Bénichou) were responsible, it would not change Georges's guilt. Moreover, if we wish we can interpret not just the tapes but the drawings, Majid's suicide and even the unwelcome appearance of Majid's son at Georges's place of work as manifestations of the latter's guilt: fantasies or phantoms that haunt him with reminders of 1961.

Caruth has proposed that certain films, such as Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), display 'a seeing and a listening *from the site of trauma*'.[16] This is a rare phenomenon, however, especially with regard to French cinema when the 'site of trauma' is Algeria. Even those French films that return to Algeria, like Bertrand Tavernier's and Patrick Rotman's documentary *The Undeclared War/La Guerre sans nom* (1992), do so in the name of French veterans, not Algerians. In *Caché* the site of the trauma is ironically far from Algeria, on a farm in *la France profonde* [rural France], where Georges grew up and from whence Majid

11 Cathy Caruth, 'Trauma and experience: introduction', in Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 8.

12 Ruth Leys, *Trauma: a Genealogy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 2. Italics in original.

13 Thomas Elsaesser, 'Postmodernism as mourning work', *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2001), p. 195. Such films include Philippe Faucon's *La Trahison* (2006), Laurent Herbiet's *Mon Colonel* (2006) and to some extent Rachid Bouchareb's World War II drama *Indigènes* (2007).

14 Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, p. 69.

15 Ibid., p. 68.

16 Cathy Caruth, 'Literature and the enactment of memory', in Lisa Saltzman and Eric M. Rosenberg (eds), *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2006), p. 214. Italics in original.

is removed, to find that his only place in French society is firstly an orphanage and subsequently the *banlieue*. It is this scene of origins lost and remembered (October 1961, the disappearance of Majid's parents, his rejection by Georges, the splitting of one from another that mirrors how postcolonial French society structured itself on racial lines) which recurs in Georges's nightmares. The site of trauma is the origin of Georges's guilt, of which Haneke has stated, '*ça devient un traumatisme parce qu'il ne veut pas reconnaître la culpabilité*' [it becomes a form of trauma because he doesn't want to acknowledge any guilt].[17] It is also the moment when witnessing is split, between Georges (whose nightmares are as fantastical as they are traumatic) and Majid (whose trauma is only briefly but bloodily represented in the drawings and his own suicide). This reflects the 'splitting of eyewitnessing' that Felman and Laub identify in testimony on trauma.[18] It also reflects *la fracture coloniale* within the fabric of contemporary French society.

Haneke's *Code Unknown/Code inconnu* (2000) is a film about fear, an emotion acted out by a deaf child in the opening sequence. *Caché* also concerns fear, notably the fear of the ethnic other, but it is primarily a film about guilt. Hence its resonance for trauma theory, which 'aims precisely to summon up the presentness of memory, to insist on unfinished business: guilt and reparation'.[19] Although there is no sign in *Caché* of reparation or closure (dismissed by Haneke as mainstream fabrications), interwoven through the film is a series of images by which guilt is visualized: the videotapes, but also the childlike drawings, as well as the nightmares and flashbacks that haunt Georges. While for Felman and Laub a traumatic event 'without a witness' such as the Holocaust 'radically annihilates the recourse (appeal) to visual corroboration', in *Caché* it is precisely the 'visual corroboration' of a trauma by the two witnesses concerned that is at stake. [20] This visualizing of (Georges's) guilt as trauma – as well as the visualizing of (Majid's) suffering as trauma – is in clear contrast to Haneke's approach in *Code inconnu*. In the earlier film, the suffering of the tortured child who lives next door to Anne is only represented obliquely: by the cries coming through the walls, by her (unseen) note asking for help, and then, with devastating and matter-of-fact speed, by her funeral. *Caché*, on the other hand, is a film about the visual traces left by trauma.

It is no surprise that the images that have generated the most discussion in accounts of the film have been the videotapes. (Again, see the recent *Screen* dossier, in particular the essays by Beugnet and by Elizabeth Ezra and Jane Sillars.)[21] Haneke's mastery of film form here, his questioning of the ontological status of what we see in order to maintain the unease and rising tension at the heart of the thriller genre, is undoubtedly brilliant. By raising insistent doubts as to whose point of view we are sharing, Haneke creates from the very first sequence to the open ending a disorienting crossover between reading the images before us as subjective or objective. He thus produces a kind of abject and fascinating cinema, wavering between the point of view of the subject

17 See Haneke, interviewed by Serge Toubiana for the DVD release of the film.

18 Cited in Janet Walker, 'The traumatic paradox: autobiographical documentary and the psychology of memory', in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (eds), *Contested Pasts: the Politics of Memory* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 108.

19 Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, 'Introduction: contested pasts', in ibid., p. 7.

20 Cited in Walker, 'The traumatic paradox', p. 108.

21 Beugnet, 'Blind spot'; Elizabeth Ezra and Jane Sillars, '*Hidden* in plain sight: bringing terror home', *Screen*, vol. 48, no. 2 (2007), pp. 215–21.

and the object. But there may be other reasons why so much has been said about the tapes and their authorship at the expense of the drawings, the nightmares or Majid's suicide. Critical reception of *Caché* in France, Britain and America has tended to stress film form rather than postcolonial trauma. *Positif* championed the film as 'a reflection on the image and its manipulation', while neglecting to mention Algeria even once.[22] While the review in *Cahiers du cinéma* did acknowledge two strands within *Caché*, one concerning history and the other the image, it declared that the brutal impact of the film lay not in the first of these strands but in the second, and notably in 'the question of knowing *who* shot the tapes'.[23] This tendency towards formalism while downplaying or ignoring the film's concern with French history could be said to derive from 'the crisis of national identity and the difficulty in integrating the colonial episode into our collective representations, which is linked to the difficulty in thinking through the question of difference'.[24]

Although menacing because of the threat they seem to represent, the tapes are empty of content. Their message within the diegesis is simple: someone is watching you. The drawings have an entirely different function. They visualize the trauma that Georges has denied for his entire adult life, they reawaken a sense of guilt long repressed. It is the drawings rather than the tapes that provoke Georges's nightmarish flashbacks, a mixture of memory and fantasy that returns him to the events of October 1961. With the second videotape comes the first drawing, a childlike image of a face vomiting blood. Georges's troubled reaction is directed at the drawing rather than the tape. Its intimate connection with his own identity is hinted at by the use of a rare closeup to show his hand holding the picture, a shot that is repeated on the discovery of the fourth and final drawing (the dying cockerel). This drawing also provokes the first flashback of the film: a tiny fragment that flashes across the screen as Georges recalls or imagines a glimpse of the face of a young boy (later decoded as that of the young Majid). The second and third drawings, arriving through the post and without any accompanying tape, both show a child with a body as well as a head, keeling over and again vomiting blood. Although the full explanation comes much later in the film, even at this early stage in the narrative the editing points towards a particular trauma: one concerned with race and memory. Hence the receipt of the second drawing is immediately followed by Georges's aggressive confrontation with the black cyclist, as if the ethnic other (up until this point absent from the film) had erupted into his consciousness like the return of the repressed. And the arrival of the third drawing is followed by another and slightly longer flashback, a childhood fantasy, that shows a child (Majid) coughing up blood in a dark room. The drawings thus trigger the return of the traumatic event. Georges's fear of Majid is later figured in another flashback which shows a nightmarish vision of Majid killing the cockerel and then approaching Georges as if to consume him; again, the core memory here is distorted by fantasy, fear and guilt, so that Majid is represented as a threat and a dark, obliterating force.

22 Yann Tobin, '*Caché*: tel est pris. . .', *Positif* (October 2005), p. 19. My translation.

23 Jean-Pierre Rehm, 'Juste sous la surface', *Cahiers du cinéma* (October 2005), p. 31. My translation. See also Mark Cousins, 'After the end: word of mouth and *Caché*', *Screen*, vol. 48, no. 2 (2007), pp. 223–6.

24 Bancel et al. (eds), 'Introduction', p. 24. My translation.

In *Trauma Culture*, Kaplan cites Janet Walker's observation that the most effective trauma films are those 'that figure the traumatic past as meaningful yet fragmentary, virtually unspeakable'.[25] One can apply this argument to *Caché* and to the fragmentary nature of Georges's memories/nightmares, perplexing glimpses of which punctuate the narrative. But what remains almost entirely unspoken, a structuring absence at the heart of the film, is the trauma suffered by Majid. The drawings and the flashbacks in this sense represent a shared trauma, one that Georges experiences as guilt but Majid as suffering. This suffering remains as invisible to Georges as it is to French society at large, for Majid has been displaced from both his own family (murdered in 1961) and Georges's family (who first welcome and then reject him) and is hidden at the margins, in a council block. Majid's dingy flat in the *banlieue* reminds us that this suburban zone has been memorably described as 'a colonial space' where the inhabitants 'experience life as "the colonized"'.[26] The trauma continues for Majid – or, if we follow Caruth's 'latency' theory, is only fully experienced by him – in the pseudo-colonial universe of the *banlieue*. It is here that his suicide takes place, a suicide which is in a sense the final drawing, the final visual trace of the trauma initiated in 1961. Both actions (drawing, suicide) involve making visible the trauma inside, taking what has been internalized and revealing it, through the splashes of red blood seen in the drawings or on the wall above Majid's corpse.[27] Where in the drawings blood spurts from the neck of the cockerel, in the suicide scene (surely the most traumatizing for the viewer, and deliberately so, although rarely evoked in accounts of the film's form) an almost identical visualization of trauma is presented by the death of a man.

As we have seen, childhood experience is central to representations of trauma in *Caché*. The same is true of a little-known but important example of testimony regarding childhood trauma from the Algerian War, Yann Le Masson's and Olga Poliakoff's documentary short *J'ai 8 ans* (1961). Shot secretly in a Tunisian refugee camp during the war, the film gathers together oral and visual testimony from half a dozen children (all boys) who witnessed the conflict firsthand. A narrative of trauma and flight structures the film, which is told by the boys over images of their own pictures and drawings: they witness the killing of family members by French soldiers; they are rescued by the Front de Libération Nationale; after a gun battle they walk to the border and into Tunisia, where for some there is a reunion with relatives. It is interesting, given the emphasis that trauma theory places on latency and belatedness, that the film takes the children's experiences and narrativizes them so soon after the event (while the conflict is still ongoing), although importantly it does so in a different place (Tunisia). One might see the children's visual and oral representation of their suffering as illustrative of the Caruthian trend within trauma theory, whereby 'the overcoming or mastery of trauma must involve "integration" and "assimilation". Foremost among

25 Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, p. 43.

26 Didier Lapeyronnie, 'La banlieue comme théâtre coloniale, ou la fracture coloniale dans les quartiers', in Blanchard et al. (eds), *La Fracture colonial*, p. 210. My translation.

27 I would therefore disagree with Paul Gilroy's assertion that the suicide makes Majid invisible and only 'communicates about Georges'. See Paul Gilroy, 'Shooting crabs in a barrel', *Screen*, vol. 48, no. 2 (2007), p. 234.

these processes . . . would be narrative and the ability to tell a (one's) story.'[28]

J'ai 8 ans is introduced by facial closeups of each boy in turn, staring at the camera. Initially shown in black and white, these images return in colour to punctuate the narrative. These shots are comparable to the facial closeups on the young Majid as he faces Georges in the nightmare sequences from *Caché*. The confrontation with the site of trauma, and with the children traumatized, which is the very purpose of *J'ai 8 ans*, is inverted in Georges's synthesis of memory and dream and thus turned into a threat, according to which he becomes the victim rather than the aggressor, a stance reiterated in his subsequent reactions to Majid, Majid's son and the black cyclist. In *J'ai 8 ans* there is no such revisionism. The violent images from the first part of the film show, with simple matter of factness, the experience of war at the hands of the French. Certain of these images prefigure the childlike drawings in *Caché*. Thus we see a prone body with blood pouring from it as a witness recalls 'they killed'. Another drawing shows a man bleeding as he is stabbed in the head while a witness says one must be careful of French soldiers. A boy's account of his father's murder is illustrated by a simple picture of a body on the ground, half obliterated by huge red X. This recording of the traumatizing effect of the conflict on Algerians is precisely what is missing from Georges's perspective in *Caché*, and indeed from several critical readings of Haneke's thriller. However, it haunts both protagonist and film in the form of the bloody drawings and Majid's bloody suicide.

Surprisingly little has been written in trauma theory on the role of children's drawings as visual testimony, despite the fact that 'The formulation of trauma as discourse is dependent upon metaphors of visuality'. Even a recent collection which takes issue with trauma literature's insistence on 'the domain of language as opposed to the visual' makes no mention of children's drawings.[29] This seems all the more surprising given the centrality of children as witnesses to traumatic events such as the Holocaust or sexual abuse, or indeed the Algerian War – as evidenced not just by *J'ai 8 ans* but also by several of the case studies recounted by Frantz Fanon at the end of his 1961 anticolonial masterpiece *Les damnés de la terre/The Wretched of the Earth*. One explanation might be that trauma theory often concerns the testimony of adults, such as survivors of genocide or of abuse, even if they experienced the trauma as children. The 'inherent latency' that Caruth identifies may contribute to this slippage from childhood trauma to adult expression. Another reason might be the close relation between children's visual testimony and art therapy. Art is currently used by UNICEF throughout the world as a means towards the psychosocial rehabilitation of traumatized children: for instance, in Algeria during the recent civil war of the last fifteen years or so UNICEF has funded activities such as drawing alongside group play, theatre and sport. Artistic activities offer traumatized children the opportunity 'to tell their

28 Elsaesser, 'Postmodernism as mourning work', p. 196. For a further gloss on Caruth's notion of trauma as 'non-traces' recoverable as narrative, see Peter Thomas, 'Victimage and violence: *Memento* and trauma theory', *Screen*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2003), p. 203.

29 Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg, 'Introduction', in Saltzman and Rosenberg (eds), *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, pp. xi–xii.

stories and to be heard and acknowledged'. As such, art provides 'a way to end isolation'. Through drawing and painting in particular, 'children can express emotions which are too difficult to express verbally, and other people can see what they are feeling'.[30] Hence children's drawings are often conceptualized as belonging to the realm of therapy rather than constituting objects of cultural study within trauma theory. It is to be hoped, however, that the impact of *Caché* and its powerful visualization of trauma via childlike drawings – albeit in a fictionalized and qualified sense[31] – may result in trauma theory engaging more fully with this means of testifying to traumatic experience, whether in the French context of *la fracture coloniale* or in relation to other national cultures.

30 Bo Nylund, Jean-Claude Legrand and Peter Holtsberg, 'The role of art in psychosocial care and protection for displaced children', *FMR*, 1999. URL: www.fmreview.org/text/FMR/06/05.htm [accessed 1 March 2006]. The same applies to non-verbal communication in music, dance, drama and puppetry.

31 The authorship of the drawings (like that of the tapes) is never resolved in the film. They are only ever referred to as childlike, and the question of who drew them, and when, remains unanswered. The formal similarity between Majid's suicide and the scenes depicted in the drawings does, however, establish a very strong link between the two and suggests forcefully that they represent his own trauma dating from 1961.